



Gay Fathers of Sacramento

Vol. 2 No. 11

NOVEMBER 1997

"Each man's life represents a road toward himself." --Herman Hesse

Presidents's Corner By Ed Callahan

An open letter to my daughter:

I realize that it has taken a long time to write this letter to you. It was easier to write your brother about my coming out as a gay man and how that information might impact his experience, his life. It is harder to write to you because you are a girl – actually a young woman – and there is a clear divergence in experience in our society by gender.

Many adult married couples suffer in pain because they do not know how to communicate across that divide in world perception and experience. It is awkward for me, as your dad, to understand your life and talk to you about it. In some ways, though, your experience as a young woman overlaps with what I experienced as a teen too.

My biggest worry now is that you will be afraid that my coming out means that you will have less of my love in your life. It is difficult to tell if that might be a concern for you- as a teen your task is to create your own space and independence- sometimes your work on creating your own world makes it hard to tell how you feel about my desire to remain close. Writing you now is a violation of your space in some ways. For that, I apologize. But I will not apologize for wanting to be close to you, nor for needing you to know how treasured you are, even if I am just one more male who cannot fully understand the experience of a woman in this world.

It is easier for me to understand your brother's world of sports, buddies and alternative music. It is closer to my experience as a teen than is your world of horses, clothes and country music. The fact that his world is easier for me to understand does not mean that I respect and value your world and your experience less. I love the time your friends spend at the house, your sleep-overs, your ordering pizza and watching horrible horror videos at horrible hours, your devotion to horseback riding and making one another laugh. I love

watching you ride for pleasure and I feel great pride in your success in riding in competition. I love talking and laughing with you, and really value those rare times you let me consult on your school assignments.

But I also know you are being exposed to critical issues in your life now, far away from me and my consultation. The decisions you make will have ramification for the degree of comfort you feel for the rest of your life. I am not talking about physical comfort- that is far less important. I am talking about the comfort you feel in listening to and speaking your own voice in the world.

Why do I value your hearing and speaking your own voice? Perhaps because it took so long
(see CALLAHAN, page 2)

Don't Forget!

MONTHLY MEETING
Sunday Nov. 9 at 6 p.m.
at the Lambda Center
919 20th Street
Sacramento

GFS meets the second
Sunday of each month.

Gay Fathers of Sacramento
Support Network
PO Box 161951
Sacramento, CA 95816-1951
Phone: (916) 456-DADS (3237)

(CALLAHAN, from page 1)

for me to find my own. As a teenager, I was devout in a religion that threatened me with eternal damnation for acting on the way I felt. I went to school with boys who mocked my effeminate classmates, while my voice stood silent. As an adult, I spoke the words "I do" to a wonderful woman, your mother, even though I was gay. Those words resulted in you and your brother, so I will never regret them but they were spoken because of pressure from the outside world instead of merely reflecting my voice.

I spoke my own voice when your mom and I separated. You could not understand why we separated since we got along so well. I told you I was gay before you knew other gays or even other kids whose parents were gay. So you had to learn to trust your own ability to make judgments instead of buying stereotypes presented by the media. You know more than many in this culture about how commonly images of people are distorted for the sake of convenience or humor. Your knowledge of the difference between stereotype and reality makes you unique among your peers. You are like me now in that you know the pressure that exists for you to silence your voice in order to allow others to be comfortable with their prejudices, their inaccuracies, their ignorance.

Knowing your own voice and speaking it is critical every day in your life now. Drugs and alcohol are widely available around you. Some kids at your high school use alcohol or drugs before class or between classes. Others leave the school to use at the end of the day and many more find drugs and alcohol on the weekend. You have to make your own choices about

alcohol and drugs at an age at which I did not even think of trying to find either. I know your voice will guide you to good decisions if you can allow yourself to keep it audible over the din of outside pressure. The alcohol and the drugs themselves add to that distraction by promising relief from boredom, discomfort, loneliness and alienation at low cost. Those whispered promises are so seductive that many sign on without realizing the long term cost is that each use makes normal pleasures harder to feel and experience later. Each short cut now changes your brain chemistry and function making your brain less sensitive to later pleasure. You know all this, but it is hard to keep in focus as those around you encourage you to take the shortcuts for today. I cannot make these choices for you. I can only tell you that your true voice has always been beautiful music to my ears and I always want to continue hearing it.

The pressure on you to quiet your true voice is enormous I know. Schools try to silence you by calling on boys to speak more often and applauding their success more loudly. History discourages your voice by failing to note the contributions of women in history, relegating accomplishments of women, people of color and gays to some dusty back closets where they can be toned down, even denied. Meanwhile, the media presents you with messages about needing to maintain an unhealthy, even sickly, weight with a demure quiet so as not to disturb others. You are told your only value is your appearance, while we both know you have a great deal more to offer with your mind and your ability to lead others. I am proud of you for not allowing yourself to be valued for your beauty alone.

Ironically, the gay world is just as

capable of failing to recognize the value of people by seeing the surface only. There is a danger of giving up a valid and unique voice just to be seen and desired. Giving up one's own voice is not healthy for the young gay man, just as it is not healthy for you. I am proud that you will not play dumb in order to make a boy comfortable.

You face a world in which sex is sometimes mixed up with power in ways that are unhealthy for the people involved. Your body is young and healthy and beautiful. Your voice is critical to making the decisions which will protect your health, your beauty and your autonomy. Just as the gay world has learned that it is critical to use condoms and keep sex safe, so too do teenagers need to learn to do the same. Just as gay men need to learn how to handle sexuality and relationships, so you will have similar lessons to learn, with few sources of consultation and support. Seeing both your mom and me in relationships has to be giving you a message about sex that others your age do not necessarily get living with parents who are not visibly sexual. I hope you can see us as models of self-respect and careful decision making about relationships and that those models are useful for you. Your voice about when to begin sexual activity and with whom will be something I will respect, even though I want to shelter you from possible mistakes. The biggest mistake I could ever make would be to join the social forces attempting to make you give up your own voice in favor of silent subservience. I promise you that I will not do that. Promise me that you will never give up your own voice either.

Love, Dad ▼

Study finds gay families among the strongest

ST PAUL, Mn. — The St. Paul Pioneer Press reports a study commissioned by a consortium of state and private agencies has discovered that gay families, those headed by parents of the same-sex, are among the strongest and healthiest of family structures surveyed.

The statewide study, based on a survey of 1,000 adults and members of 400 families, is part of the Minnesota Family Strength Project — a joint project undertaken by the state's Family and Children's

Service agency; the Allina Foundation; the Minnesota Historical Society; and Minnesota Public Radio.

The study noted that nearly 80 percent of state residents polled felt their families were "very strong" or exceptionally strong and that the biggest stresses reported by families were not big crises but petty day-to-day arguments and disagreements.

While gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report their original families were less strong,

owing perhaps to problems they experienced growing up, the Pioneer Press says the families they created as adults tended to score most consistently as the healthiest and strongest of any surveyed.

Explaining the surprising finding, authors noted, "Perhaps same sex couples, in their struggle to adapt in a relatively hostile culture, have developed certain strengths — better communication skills or support systems, for example," that make their families particularly healthy. ▼

Joint custody awarded to New Jersey gay couple

HACKENSACK, NJ — The New York Times reports a state court judge in New Jersey yesterday granted a gay couple adoption rights to a 2-year-old foster child they had been caring for since he was 3 months old.

Friends and family of the two men, Jon Holden and Michael Galluccio, cheered and embraced when news of the decision reached them as they waited outside the Bergen County Courthouse. "We're so grateful for what has happened today," Holden said on the courthouse steps. "We're a family now." Gay couples are not barred from

adopting children in New Jersey, but each partner is usually required to file separately, doubling court costs. Holden and Galluccio challenged the law and won.

The decision, the Times quotes legal experts as saying, was narrowly focused and thus does not overturn the state law requiring separate filings for unmarried couples. Sybil R. Moses, who decided the case, told the Times she granted the joint adoption to the two men "solely because it was in the best interest of the child."

While it is doubtful the

decision will provide precedent in other adoption cases, Gina Reiss, president of the New Jersey Lesbian and Gay Coalition, told the Times the ruling "absolutely [brings] us closer to formal recognition of gay and lesbian unions."

Michael Adams, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, told the Times that Wednesday's ruling follows two precedent setting court decisions made in 1995 that allowed gay partners to adopt the children of their partners. Adams said the effort to make joint adoption more prevalent "is the next front in gay adoption cases." ▼

Frank Delivers I-677 Morale-Boosting Speech

SEATTLE — The Seattle Times reports Rep. Barney Frank, the openly gay congressman from Massachusetts, flew across country to deliver a rousing speech to campaign workers and other supporters of the Washington state gay rights ballot measure, Initiative 677.

Conservatives Blast Gore Over "Ellen" Comments

WASHINGTON — The Washington Post reports Vice President Al Gore is being roundly criticized by conservatives for comments made in a speech in which he applauded the television show "Ellen" and the effect the program has had in promoting a more tolerant view of gay people.

Virginia Moves to Repeal Local Gay Benefits Law

RICHMOND, Va. — The Washington Post reports Virginia's first and only plan to offer health insurance benefits to the domestic partners of gay and lesbian county employees in Arlington was called illegal on Monday by the state Attorney General Richard Cullen.

Poetry & Quotations ...

[POEM]

A FATHER IRONING HIS SON'S SHIRT

How quickly it changes,
the sky, and all it embraces.
I watch it through the kitchen window,
dark clouds racing northward:
a vast herd of buffalo
thundering to the abyss of extinction.
And yet, for now, a reprieve.

I cradle my young son's
cotton shirt on the ironing board.
With heated discipline
I hope to give it some form.
He will wash his face, comb his hair,
and wear this shirt when he leaves tomorrow.

His shoulders are growing
and so is the burden that hesitates there.
His chest swelling with the atmosphere
that belongs to his generation.
His arms grow stronger, still
the changing sky is beyond his grasp
and closer than his shirt.

How I love this beautiful shirt
when it clings to his body
becoming the walls of a temple,
a curtain shielding the *most holy*
proclaiming only the High Priest may enter,
his heart beating on the altar.

For now, the pockets are smooth and warm,
I press its breast to my lips
and give the kiss
only a father can give.
My hand swims along the collar
and down the buttons ...

Soon, I know
this shirt
will be folded and put away.

— Austin Lewis

Foreign phrases that might come in handy on THANKSGIVING!

"**Ab ovo usque ad mala.**" [L.] (lit.,
"from the egg to the apples." A line
from Horace referring to the complete
Roman dinner, the first to last course.)

"**à bon appétit il ne faut point de
sauce.**" [Fr.] (a good appetite needs
no sauce.)

"**Dis-moi ce que tu manges, et je
dirai ce que tu es.**" [Fr.] (Tell me
what you eat, and I will tell you what
you are.)

"**Il n'est sauce que d'appétit.**" [Fr.]
(Hunger is the best sauce.)

"**I frutti proibiti sono i più dolci.**"
[It.] (Forbidden fruits are the
sweetest.)

"**Kinder, Küche, und Kirche**" [Ger.]
(Children, kitchen, and church. — Ger-
man nationalist doctrine describing
the place of women in society. Use
caution.)

"**O peior porco come a melhor
glande.**" [Pg.] (The worst pig eats
the best acorn.)

"**In vino veritas.**" [L.] (In wine there
is truth.)

"**Nunc est bibendum.**" [L.] (Now
is the time for drinking.)

"**Dios que da la llaga, da la
medicina.**" [Sp.] (God who gives the
wound gives the medicine.)

"**I gran dolori sono muti.**" [It.]
(Great sorrows are silent.)